

Networks and projects

Implementation networks in Africa

The introduction of implementation networks as part of research planning in the HSRC is an important development. By working closely with strategic partners in networks the HSRC aims to increase the relevance, utilisation and potential impact of human and social science research.

SAHARA

SAHARA undertakes multi-country and multi-site research, which enables it to make a significant contribution to evidence-based policy formulation and practice, and ensure widespread dissemination of results through its network of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners in 26 African countries. The network established a strategic tripartite relationship with SADC and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Within this framework, it participates in several conferences sponsored by SADC and UNAIDS, including: the Southern African Regional Partnership Forum Meetings of SADC and UNAIDS in South Africa and Zambia, and a SADC Leadership Conference in Zimbabwe. It also participated in a technical review of the SADC Prevention Strategy in South Africa, a workshop in Botswana to review the HIV and AIDS research agenda of SADC, and an extraordinary meeting of HIV and AIDS Technical Advisory Committee of SADC in Botswana.

It participated in the second and third Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA)-HSRC working meetings, during which decisions were taken for: a collaborative meeting of networks to be convened to synergise the efforts of SAHARA and the CODESRIA. Other initiatives included the convening of a region-wide meeting on the prevention of HIV and AIDS, with the participation of CODESRIA; mutual exchange of information on a Continental Policy Dialogue on National AIDS Councils to be organised by CODESRIA; and collaboration in a joint exploratory research on child-headed households and their implications.



It presented research findings to national AIDS committees, donors and state authorities (particularly in Senegal, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Mali and Ghana) in order to sensitise them to the issues of the vulnerability of marginalised groups such as MSM and poor (unofficial) female commercial sex workers. The official language of the Senegalese Ministry of Health changed and included the words MSM after the SAHARA conference held in Dakar, Senegal in which MSM organisations played a visible role.

Through networking activities, effective dissemination of research findings and capacity-building workshops, the SAHARA network influenced HIV/AIDS approaches and policies developed by national AIDS committees, NGOs, state representatives, international agencies, community leaders and stakeholders.



Affiliated Network for Social Accountability (ANSA-Africa)

ANSA-Africa is a World Bank-funded initiative that started in August 2006 with the secretariat being established at the HSRC. A pan-African executive committee provides strategic oversight to the initiative and a Technical Advisory Group provides specialist technical inputs into the initiative. The objectives of ANSA-Africa are to: develop cross-country collaboration on social accountability and government initiatives in Africa; provide technical assistance in the implementation of social accountability initiatives; deliver training programmes on specific tools and techniques; and share experiences and lessons on the implementation of social accountability methods. Several activities have been implemented by ANSA-Africa including the holding of a stakeholder workshop, establishing a network of more than 1 600 members across Africa and developing a knowledge portal that to date has on average 2 000 hits per day.

ANSA-Africa has also provided technical and financial support to several initiatives that have been undertaken by partners on the continent. This included the holding of training workshops in Ethiopia, Madagascar and Lesotho. The Municipal Development Partnership's (MDP) conference on participatory budgeting was also supported with funding. ANSA-Africa has co-ordinated the implementation of the Africa's Social Accountability Profile (ASAP) project that involved national partners in seven countries assessing what social accountability initiatives are on the go and what they need from ANSA-Africa in terms of technical support and training.

ANSA-Africa has established a significant network across the continent. Through its knowledge portal it disseminates information to this network and the global community on all aspects relating to social accountability and the use of different methods. ANSA-Africa also provides technical assistance to workshops conducted throughout the continent. Through these mechanisms it is improving the knowledge and use of social accountability methods in Africa.



African Migration Alliance (AMA)

The AMA is a network of concerned researchers oriented toward raising the priority of migration research among African governments, with emphasis on identifying trends across the continent and documenting the influence of under-researched migration drivers including climate change and job search.

The AMA steering committee includes representation from internationally recognised scholars in Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and Democratic Republic of Congo as well as South Africa, while the secretariat is currently based at the HSRC in Pretoria. African institutions involved include Droits Humaines Sans Frontieres in Kinshasa, POHDEV in Dakar, the University of Ife, and the African Population and Environment Institute in Nairobi.

Institutional funding is currently under discussion with the national DSD as a key AMA partner, and funding is also being sought for anchor projects in regard to climate change and food security as a migration driver, and in youth migration.

Integrated Planning Development and Modelling (IPDM)

The IPDM in partnership with CSIR and DST has a wide and expanding implementation network, based on links with the key implementing departments charged with responsibility for spatial planning in relation to housing and services delivery. In addition to support from the deputy minister of Science and Technology, stakeholders include the national DoH's programmes in Sustainable Human Settlements and Communications and Information, as well as the Department of Transport, National Treasury, the national Department of Provincial and Local Government (DPLG) and the cities of Cape Town and Johannesburg.

Dissemination links for the distribution of the online planning instrument under development include the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), and also the national DSD with support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

CODESRIA network



The CEO with delegates at a network seminar in Johannesburg between CODESRIA and the HSRC



The CEO addresses representatives at a meeting to consolidate and strengthen the HSRC's working relationship with CODESRIA

The Democracy and Governance research programme is leading aspects of HSRC collaborative ventures with pan-African research institutions, particularly CODESRIA. Under this collaboration, the South Africa in Africa project was launched this year bringing together a network of leading African researchers. Along similar lines, the identity and citizen project established a network of African scholars dealing with the issues of citizenship and identity. Scholars in this network are drawn from African institutions in diverse countries including: Angola, Cote d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Networks have also been established with researchers in the global south, especially India, Brazil, Cuba, Iran, Palestine, Israel and China.

The HSRC and CODESRIA jointly convened a network seminar in Johannesburg, South Africa from 11 to 12 October 2007. Professor Adebayo Olukhoshi and Dr Peter Kagwanja convened the meeting.

Demonstration projects

South Africa has major social problems that require implementation of evidence-based interventions. It is up to social scientists to assist policy-makers and other decision-makers in testing the effectiveness of proposed interventions in communities. This new approach would entail demonstrating, firstly, that a concept is working in a research setting, and secondly, implementing it, and eventually evaluating its effectiveness in a district with the aim of assisting government in scaling up the project.

Project Accept

Project Accept, a large scale, four-country community randomised trial, has now entered its second year of intervention. It consists of delivering mobile voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) services, coupled with community mobilisation and post-test psychosocial support to communities in Vulindlela, outside Pietermaritzburg. By the end of May 2008, 5 105 clients had participated in the mobile VCT services, with a high testing uptake rate of 97%. A significant contribution to this novel, easy to access and convenient mobile VCT approach, as compared to more standard facility-based VCT methods, is in relation to gender and age of service users. The mobile units continue to attract relatively equal numbers of men (45%) and women (55%) to testing. With respect to age, more than 72% of the testers fall between the ages of 16 and 32, with a median testing age of 24.

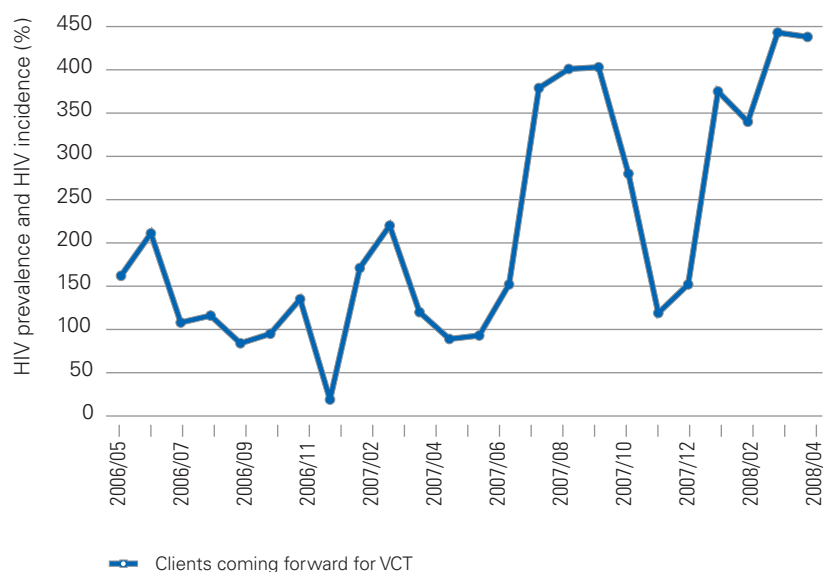


Figure 9. Project Accept: Uptake of VCT



Gathering at Project Accept's Sweetwaters site for Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT)

Phaphama – wise up

A set of intervention programmes, under the name Phaphama (meaning 'wise up' or 'be wise'), have been developed and tested in collaboration with the University of Connecticut, USA. These are mainly aimed at providing evidence-based behaviour change interventions as a means to reduce new HIV infections. Apart from targeting individuals, some interventions are now beginning to target whole communities in order to try to change social norms.

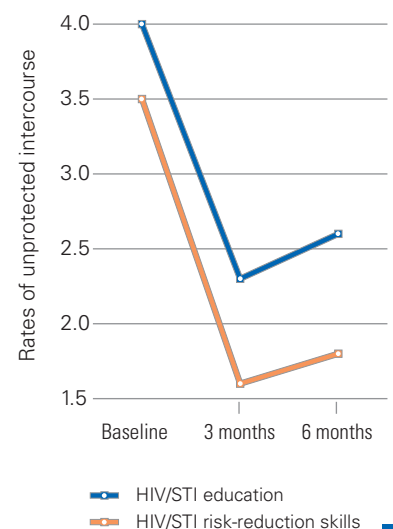
Phaphama 1A: Substance abuse and theory-based HIV-risk reduction intervention is a three-year pilot project, funded by the USA's National Institute of Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse (NIAAA) through the University of Connecticut. It involves developing and piloting a theory-based risk reduction intervention for patients with sexually transmitted infections in a clinic, and groups of male and female adults in a community setting. The aim is to reduce both alcohol drinking linked to sexual behaviour and risky sex behaviour to reduce HIV infections. Although the alcohol use reduction was ephemeral, the behavioural risk reduction was shown to be effective as measured by the use of condoms during sex and the proportions of protected sexual acts.

Figure 10. Reduction in unprotected intercourse in past months (Phaphama 1A)

Based on data from Kalichman, Simbayi, Jooste et al., 2007

This study was followed-up by a five-year, multi-level alcohol project, aimed at reducing HIV infections by changing alcohol drinking linked to sexual behaviour, and changing risk behaviour among men who patronise informal drinking places (or shebeens). It also intends to change those socio-cultural norms and values that increases HIV infection through advocacy, using the men's social networks. The study, which is funded by the NIAAA, will further develop the small group-based intervention that was piloted in the community in Phaphama II (see following paragraph) among the completed projects. The project will be undertaken in 12 communities matched into six pairs in each arm of the randomised control study. The main rationale for the study is to see if concomitantly changing individual behaviour and socio-cultural values and norms about drinking are linked to risky sexual behaviour.

Phaphama II: The opportunity to replicate and test whether a theory-based HIV-risk reduction intervention can be generalised, has been made possible through funding by the NIMH. The intervention involves 1 800 patients with sexually-



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transmitted infections at three primary health care clinics in the provinces of Gauteng, Eastern Cape and Western Cape. This study is progressing well and will soon be implemented in the three clinics.

Two sub-studies include testing the efficacy of the intervention on people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), and another testing the efficacy of counselling of sighted individuals of both sexes by a totally blind, male behavioural risk-reduction counsellor. The study is scheduled to be completed in 2010.

HIV and gender violence

A four-year project, funded by the NIMH, involves developing and piloting a theory-based risk-reduction intervention for small groups of men in Gugulethu and Delft townships in Cape Town. The aim is to change gender attitudes and to reduce violence committed by men against women. It also includes reducing HIV infection among men through behavioural interventions and advocacy, using the men's social networks. All the fieldwork has been completed, and data has been captured and cleaned. Both the qualitative and quantitative results are being analysed and written up.

Positive prevention among PLWHA

As more people become aware of their HIV status, one of the major challenges is to promote behavioural risk reduction among them to promote primary and secondary prevention. A new approach, known as positive prevention, aims to achieve both goals. The HSRC is collaborating with the original developers of the interventions to adapt it to local conditions and can thereby benefit directly from their expertise. The two interventions are known as Healthy Relationships, and Options for Health. The HSRC is working with the Medical Research Council and the University of the Western Cape's School of Public Health to evaluate and roll-out the Options for Health intervention in all clinics, and is providing antiretroviral treatment in the Western Cape province.

National Assessment of Learner Achievement

A survey, conducted in collaboration with the national Department of Education (DoE) to design and implement the grade 9 national assessment (systemic evaluation) survey at the end of 2008, will be administered to a sample of approximately 600 schools. These schools are selected from all education districts in the country, and will involve approximately 2 400 learners, 1 800 teachers, 600 principals, and 160 DoE officials.

The purpose of the survey is to:

- report on learner levels of performance against all assessment standards specified in the National Curriculum Statements for Grade 9 English (First Additional Language), mathematics and natural sciences; and
- obtain information on the functioning of the system at the end of grade 9 for use by policy-makers to develop and implement effective strategies to enhance learning in all South African schools.

The final reports from this project will be completed by September 2009.

Improving teacher assessment practices and skills

The aim of this project is to enhance teaching and learning by improving the classroom assessment practices of teachers. It is premised on the understanding that teachers need appropriate support, development and resources to enable them to effectively use assessment to obtain relevant information for use in enhancing learning. This project is conducted in collaboration with provincial and district education officials and comprises three interrelated studies:

- Review of classroom assessment practices;
- Developing and piloting classroom assessment resources for improving learning; and
- Review of professional development programmes for improving teacher assessment skills.

The project will be piloted at the Intermediate Phase focusing on English (First Additional Language) and mathematics, and will involve learners, teachers, school principals and DoE officials from primary schools selected from one district in each of the four participating provinces. The assessment frameworks were developed from the National Curriculum Statements, and a database of grade 6 items were developed in order to determine learner performance against all assessment standards.

The field trials for this project will be completed by November 2008, while the pilot study will be conducted in selected schools in participating districts drawn from four provinces. The purpose of the pilot is to ascertain the effect of the new classroom assessment system on teaching practices and learner performance, and to identify financial and human resource implications for scaling up interventions that work.

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